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Ghana: Rawlings Takes Charge Again

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The structure and direction of Ghana's new government still is uncertain nearly a month after a New Year's Eve coup that brought former Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings to power for the second time in two years. Rawlings, a self-professed populist, has proclaimed a "Holy War" against corruption and has promised to involve the public in still undefined plans to transform Ghana's social and economic order. Rawlings has sought to assure Western aid donors and foreign investors by pledging to honor Ghana's existing international obligations and by promising a policy of genuine nonalignment. But the new regime's quick decision to resume relations with Libya and the presence of radicals in the government have raised major questions.

The government is experiencing difficulty attracting prominent civilians to serve and most Ghanaians are showing little enthusiasm toward Rawlings. No major opposition to the new regime has surfaced, but attitudes in the military are divided at best. Unless Rawlings moves soon to assert firm leadership and take concrete measures to reverse Ghana's disastrous 20-year economic decline, further unrest may erupt. As the government attempts to grapple with economic and internal security problems, it may become more leftist than its predecessors. This could galvanize ambivalent moderates in the military into anti-Rawlings activity.

Background to the Coup

Jerry Rawlings ruled Ghana from June to September 1979 in a government made up of junior officers and enlisted men. His coup in 1979 was a direct response to the economic mismanagement and corruption that marked the previous eight years of military rule in Ghana. He quickly became a folk hero to Ghana's military and civilian have-nots by championing a "revolution" to stamp out corruption, extravagance, and malpractices that had brought Ghana to the brink of collapse.



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Head of State Rawlings

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In practice, Rawlings produced few results. His popularity eroded, and the regime became increasingly bogged down in tribal infighting. His government barely held together long enough to meet the target date for return to civilian rule—a date set by an earlier regime that Rawlings decided to honor.

Soon after handing over power to an elected civilian government led by President Limann, Rawlings came to regret his decision, blaming Limann for Ghana's worsening economic crisis. Several coup plots allegedly involving Rawlings were uncovered during Limann's rule, including one shortly before the actual takeover, but the civilian government feared arresting him because of his popularity. By late 1981, Limann, a colorless civil servant, had come under growing public criticism for failing to halt infighting and corruption in the ruling party and for avoiding long-overdue economic reforms demanded by the IMF.

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The New Regime's Aims

Rawlings is no less obsessed than before with the plight of Ghana's have-nots. He has repeated his promise to raise the standard of living and to rid the country of corruption and mismanagement. In his first major speech two days after the coup, Rawlings dwelled on his commitment to restructure Ghanaian society by involving the people in decisionmaking. []

Rawlings appears to be trying to avoid the mistakes of his first regime. His attempts to project a moderate image and promises to follow a nonaligned foreign policy are calculated efforts to avoid alienating the Western investors and economic aid donors. Rawlings's behavior in 1979, particularly the summary executions of several former heads of state and other prominent Ghanaians, aroused Western and African ire and prompted Nigeria to cut off oil supplies. []

New Government Structure

Plans call for the government to be controlled by a seven-man Provisional National Defense Council led by Rawlings. Four more members may be appointed later. The only prominent moderate to join the council is Chief of Defense Staff Brig. Gen. Nunoo Mensah. The other five members, three civilians and two enlisted men, are obscure, mediocre radicals. The council is tribally and regionally balanced—Rawlings is the only Ewe tribesman, for example—but its day-to-day operations and the influence of its members are unclear. []

The two enlisted men represent the newly formed Armed Forces Defense Committees, one of several undefined structures established by the regime to defend the "gains of the revolution" and to expose saboteurs and counterrevolutionaries. Other groups include Workers Defense Committees and People's Defense Committees, which appear to be Ghanaian versions of similar structures found in Libya and other radical African states. []

People's Tribunals are being formed outside existing laws to enforce the regime's anticorruption drive. Plans call for public trials of former government officials but apparently not executions. There is still a possibility, however, that Rawlings will not be able to

avoid a witch hunt, particularly as sentiment grows to deal harshly with former members of the Limann government. []

Key Figures

Rawlings, a 34-year-old former Air Force pilot and the son of a Scottish father and a mother from the Ewe tribe, appears to be making all the major decisions. Although supposedly more aware politically than during his 1979 regime, Rawlings still is said to be ideologically immature. []

[] While frustrated with the gap between rich and poor and the collapse of the Ghanaian economy, he has never developed adequate plans for rectifying these ills. []

Rawlings rebuffed Libyan and Ethiopian delegations that came to Accra shortly after his coup in 1979, and he took offense at Fidel Castro's belittling of his "revolution" during a visit to Havana for the Non-aligned summit later that year. Despite his early snub of Libya, Rawlings maintained loose contacts with Libya after he left office, visiting Tripoli in 1980 and praising Libyan society. []

In addition to Nunoo Mensah, Rawlings's other key military associate is Army Commander Arnold Quainoo, who is of mixed Ewe-Akan blood. Both men served in Rawlings's first government but were forcibly retired by Limann. They are regarded as moderates and pragmatists who are well disposed toward the West. []

Nunoo Mensah and Quainoo have served as primary contacts between the new government and Western diplomats, and have expressed concern over the possibility of Libyan inroads in Ghana should Western economic aid falter. Nunoo Mensah and Quainoo apparently believe they can keep the new regime on a moderate course, but there is some evidence they do not get along well together. Quainoo, unlike Nunoo Mensah, has not been appointed to the ruling council. []

Little is known of the other five members of the council other than they appear to owe their positions to their roles as key representatives of military and civilian interest groups. Reverend Vincent Kwabena

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Damuah, a leftist Catholic priest and possibly a Fante, reportedly takes the Church's social teachings seriously. He was a vocal critic of corruption during the Nkrumah regime (1957-66) and was briefly imprisoned by Nkrumah. Army Warrant Officer Class One Joseph Adjei Buadi, Coordinator of the Armed Forces Defense Committees and apparently an Ashanti tribesman, has been in the Army since 1964 and served as Rawlings's aide in 1979. Army Sgt. Daniel Alolga Akata-Pore, secretary of the Armed Forces Defense Committees, is a northerner. He was involved in Rawlings's first coup but was subsequently on the periphery of Rawlings's inner circle. He attended law school following his forced retirement from the Army by the Limann government. []

Jaochim Amartee Kwei, a radical trade unionist and member of the Ga tribe, was dismissed by the Limann government for leading a wildcat strike and a one-day occupation of parliament in 1980. He does not get along with current labor leaders and may be behind efforts to intimidate the leadership of Ghana's Trade Union Congress, which represents 520,000 workers and which has traditionally eschewed politics. Kwei is said to be close to one of Rawlings's leftist advisers—Tsatsu Tsikata. Chris Bukari Atim, reportedly a northern Builsa tribesman, was a student leader in Ghana's leftist National Union of Ghanaian Students before his graduation in 1979. He subsequently became an editor of a pro-Rawlings newsletter that had an anti-Western and anti-American slant. []

Although not on the council, other figures appear influential as well. Ben Forjoe, a former civil servant, is in charge of revamping internal security and probably will be named Minister for Internal Affairs. []

[] Forjoe has selected Kofi Quantson, a former director of security under Rawlings, as his assistant. Both men are considered [] with moderate views. They are suspicious of the Communist Bloc and can be expected to monitor closely Libyan activities in Ghana. []

Rawlings's closest leftist advisers probably are the Tsikata brothers, although they are not officially part of the new government. Kojo and Tastsu Tsikata are Ewe tribesmen and cousins of Rawlings. Kojo Tsikata

is a retired military officer and a self-styled Marxist and African revolutionary with wide connections in militant circles at home and abroad. He maintains close contacts with the Cubans and has urged Rawlings to adopt Cuba and Ethiopia as models for Ghana. Tsatsu Tsikata is a Marxist-oriented law instructor at the University of Ghana. He was frequently on the lecture circuit during the Limann regime, propounding Rawlings's populist and "revolutionary" virtues. []

Popular Reactions

Most Ghanaians have shown little enthusiasm for the new government. Although Limann was widely faulted as a weak and lackluster leader, the public appears to realize that Rawlings probably offers no better alternative—given his past record. Some radical fringe groups have expressed support for the regime, hoping to gain influence, but most prominent moderates have adopted a wait-and-see attitude. []

Middle class professionals, who fear they have the most to lose under Rawlings, have criticized the People's Courts and have called on the regime to return Ghana to civilian rule by next year. Rawlings seems to envision a prolonged stay in power this time and has given no public clues about his views on civilian rule. []

The leaders of the Trade Union Congress have reluctantly expressed lukewarm support for the new regime and have organized some demonstrations on Rawlings's behalf. They probably hope these actions will forestall interference with trade unions and help preserve the organization's independence. []

The jubilation among lower ranking military personnel that accompanied Rawlings's takeover in 1979 is not evident this time around. Retired soldiers involved in the coup and the small group of enlisted men who rallied shortly after the start of the coup are loyal to Rawlings. But most military personnel are apathetic, and they remain a potentially volatile force. []

Many officers who blame Rawlings for the split between officers and enlisted men in 1979 are not pleased at Rawlings's return. Rawlings's supporters on the Provisional National Defense Council are keeping a close watch on the officer corps, which so

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far is maintaining a low profile. The recent murder of a young lieutenant, [redacted] will add to the officers' apprehensions. [redacted]

Foreign Responses

Libya quickly recognized the new government, and offered to aid it by sending troops and food. Rawlings rejected the military help, but expressed interest in economic aid. He quickly announced the resumption of diplomatic relations that had been severed in November 1980 by the Limann government. This move probably was motivated in part by his desire to have an alternative oil supplier in case of a possible cutoff by Nigeria. Although Rawlings has several advisers with pro-Libyan sympathies, he has been careful thus far in his dealings with the Libyans, knowing that many Ghanaians, including those in the military, would not welcome Libyan meddling. [redacted]

The USSR is taking an optimistic view of the new regime, blaming Ghana's economic and social problems on previous pro-Western governments and launching a disinformation campaign against the United States. Encouraged by the resumption of diplomatic relations with Libya, the Soviets would like to establish cordial relations with the new government and regain the position they once enjoyed in Ghana under radical President Nkrumah. [redacted]

Western governments have been deliberately circumspect toward the new regime. While disappointed at the demise of democratic civilian rule, they hope that by not cutting off their economic aid they can convince Rawlings to adhere to a moderate and non-aligned course. Fears persist, however, that Rawlings will turn to radical solutions in his quest for a "new Ghana." [redacted]

All neighboring states are taking a low-key approach until the Rawlings government is established and its orientation becomes clear. Nigeria supplies over 80 percent of Ghana's petroleum and hopes that by continuing its oil shipments Rawlings will be less inclined to turn to the Libyans or Soviets for support. [redacted]

Most of Ghana's pro-Western neighbors are vulnerable to Libyan meddling and would view a Libyan-

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influenced radical regime in Ghana with alarm. Rawlings has sent a goodwill delegation to Upper Volta, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria in an effort to assure these countries that Ghana will honor the commitments of the previous government and that his regime wants to continue normal relations. [redacted]

Economic Woes

Economic conditions were the catalyst for the coup and Rawlings must begin to take action soon if he wants to gain public confidence in his regime. Rawlings is likely to have difficulty lining up economic advisers and forming a recovery program for Ghana's deteriorating financial situation. With foreign exchange nearly exhausted and world markets for its primary exports depressed, Ghana must look to outside sources for money to meet daily operating expenses. Only an agreement with the IMF can bring in the necessary balance-of-payments support; such an accord could pave the way for some Western donor aid and up to \$275 million from the Fund itself. Ghana's only immediate hope, however, is to get the 82,000 metric tons of cocoa now upcountry to port, a move that would bring in about \$160 million. [redacted]

The supply of goods in the marketplace is drying up because Rawlings's call for reduced prices on staples has heightened consumer demand but lowered seller's profits. Ghana is unable to increase imports because most banks are unwilling to issue new letters of credit—the country already is roughly \$100 million in arrears on foreign exchange remittances. Moreover, Ghana owes Nigeria \$120 million for past oil deliveries and currently has a supply of only two months' worth of gasoline and one month of crude oil. [redacted]

If Rawlings cannot do something soon to improve living conditions, the public may lose patience as consumer goods disappear and other problems remain unrelieved. Unrest could again develop, forcing Rawlings to become more leftist in a search for radical solutions to the country's economic crisis. If Rawlings turns to his radical advisers and attempts to galvanize the people with revolutionary measures, moderate military officers may believe it necessary to take matters into their own hands. [redacted]

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